

main office by a walled-off wall of ash, the doorkeeper conducted the two expectant Norwegians into the chief's presence. Gunnar found himself face to face with a robust man of 45, with a broad beard sprinkled with gray, and fine, energetic features. He was carefully, almost fashionably, dressed, but there was in his bearing something angular and uncompromising, a kind of homeliness, almost directness. The expression was, however, a trifle worried, and his eyes were restless. He looked like a strong man with a bad conscience.

"I thought I'd drop in and see you," began Lawson teasingly.

"How much?" asked Norman quickly, "well, how much you demand? You know I have no time for fooling. And please give me a receipt now. I think I've earned it."

"How you do go on!" grumbled the grocer. "I haven't said a word about money. I just brought you this young man, who is looking for a job. You'd better give him the office or the factory."

The manufacturer, bristling his impatience, fixed his eyes with a startled glance upon Gunnar. The Norse type in the youth was unmistakable, the frank blue eyes, half appealing in their trustfulness; the blonde hair brushed back from the forehead with a sort of rising wave; the short, strong, regular teeth, and a certain amiable rusticity in manner and bearing.

Norman saw perhaps even more, but knowing that his money conscience was apt to play him tricks he dismissed the memories which rose up before him.

"What can the young man do?" he asked in a matter of fact tone, turning to Lawson.

"Oh, I guess he can do almost anything."

"That is the same as to say that he can do nothing."

"I reckon that he can earn his board and lodging."

"What can the young man do?"

lodging, and that is about all he expects to do for the present."

"Very well, I'll find him a place. It is a pity he doesn't understand the language of his country. You may well say so, and he was born in the state of Minnesota."

"Great Scott! Don't I know the work of those blasted persons! A native of the United States, 18 or 19 years old, who doesn't understand the language of his country! You'd have to travel all over the globe to find another case like it. But those little Lutheran people, they know what they are about. From the moment their people learn English and can assimilate American ideas they are lost to the cause. They can no longer be guided and bullied and threatened with eternal damnation if they think a little for themselves, and indulge a little heresy on the subject of the infallibility of the Norwegian Lutheran church."

This was as Lawson knew, a sore topic with Norman. He was intensely American in sentiment, and called against the Norwegian clergy for isolating their countrymen from the national life and discouraging them from learning the English language.

"I'd pay that young fellow a good salary if he had had an English common school education," he went on indignantly, "but in order to keep his pure Lutheran faith undisturbed he has been allowed to grow up in ignorance in a parochial school, fed on the books of doctrinal squabbles and studiously kept an alien in the midst of this rich and magnificent country, to be a citizen of which ought to be a source of pride to any man."

Lawson, who had always tried to keep a safe middle ground on this question, being a Norwegian among Norwegians and an American among Americans, regarded it as imprudent to commit himself, and therefore only nodded an equivocal approval and murmured:

"It's my way, that's a fact! Shouldn't wonder."

It was soon settled that Gunnar was to be employed in the factory at a salary of \$8 a week, with the promise of advancement as rapidly as his usefulness warranted. He had sat gazing silently at the big railroad man with covered eyes, and of the office while Lawson and Norman settled the deal, being unable to comprehend their language. It was a relief to him to follow the thick red lines across the continent, interesting with thinner red lines and black lines, and to find him seemingly to divert his thought from the all-absorbing consciousness which glowed and labored within him that this was indeed his father. Indignation on his mother's account was at first his uppermost feeling; but, on the other hand, it seemed difficult to believe all of a man with face like that of Mr. Norman. If he was a scoundrel, as Gunnar was compelled to believe that he was, he must have found it terribly hard work, for nature had never intended him to be a scoundrel. Yet the more he was to blame.

The thought occurred to the young man, and had no sooner occurred than it took complete possession of his mind, that he would avenge upon this heartless adventurer the sorrow and suffering he had caused his poor, abandoned wife during all these years. But to do this he must follow Norman's example. He must disguise himself. What form his vengeance was to take he could not tell, but the spur of the moment, but he would unmask the impostor, hold him up before the community whose administration he courted as the black-hearted monster he was. And to this end he would instantly set about learning English. He would devote all his energies to it and accomplish it in the shortest possible time.

He started palpably while nursing this passionate purpose when Mr. Norman addressed him, but understood presently that he was to write his name in a book. His transparent face bespoke the turmoil that agitated his heart. He began to divine that Lawson, who was probably the only one in possession of Mr. Norman's secret, had made it as profitable to himself as possible, and that now, when the manufacturer was beginning to use of his book, mail, he was turning it to fresh account in similar transactions with the opposite side. All these reflections flashed through his brain as he received the pen from Lawson's hand. He stooped down over the ledger and wrote Finn Varsko.

Norman glanced curiously at the signature and closed the book.

"Finn Varsko," he murmured, "that is a curious name."

CHAPTER VII.

Two years passed rapidly and Gunnar became proficient in English. He took a lesson of one hour every evening from his landlady's daughter, the charming Mathilda, who, when the student with the beer

had taken French leave of negligence

of her life's happiness by this man's duplicity and cruelty. To make money out of such a transaction seemed to him so-called, base, infamous. He came near quarreling outright with Mathilda, who with all her cleverness was not clever enough to discover that she had made a fatal mistake in affording him so deep a glimpse into her hard and necessary little heart. She had to resort to tears and caresses in order to obliterate the impression, whereupon she overwhelmed him with reproaches for having thought her capable of the very scheme which she had attempted to develop. And he, poor fellow, kissed her and begged her forgiveness for having misunderstood her, and imagined that very likely his intellect was not sufficiently subtle to comprehend the fine gradations of meaning conveyed in this exquisite creature's speech. He was so preposterously happy at the privileges she now granted him that he could not have found it in his heart to blame her if she had proposed to him a systematic transgression of the ten commandments, beginning with the first and ending with the tenth.

After this delightful reconciliation Gunnar accepted of Mathilda's offer and installed himself in two pleasant rooms overlooking Lake Michigan. And Mathilda, who perhaps overestimated her hold upon his affections, resolved to postpone the execution of her plan until a more favorable moment.

CHAPTER VIII.

One would have supposed that Gunnar, armed with this knowledge, would have been proof against any further blandishments. But to knowledge is a protection against that kind of assaults. There was to him a delicious thrill of danger in the situation which to her was entirely absent. She had seen more of the world than he, and some-thing in order to tease him, gave him grandiose advice. She warned his innocent secrets out of him, and obtained finally a confession of all his misdeeds. He felt so desperately wicked in having won the love of Ingerid, and then spurned it, that it was a great relief to him to be able to call himself a lawbreaker in the presence of a sympathetic listener. He did not fail to perceive that Mathilda, while condemning his faithlessness, looked upon him with a livelier interest after this confession, and he could not help feeling a little more in the midst of all his wickedness.

What a lovely character, he argued, this gentle maiden must have to forgive all his past, and treat him with such kindness and sweet consideration. Why, knowing how disinterested she was, should he hold back from her his other sins, far more important secrets? He had repeatedly hinted at it in her presence, and though her curiosity had been vaguely piqued she had failed to rise to the occasion. She treated his mysterious allusions as if she only half believed them, and replied to his dark observations with an absent-minded vivacity which tried him sorely. He felt at last that his self-respect compelled him to reveal the plot of which he was both victim and author. He was irritated beyond all endurance, and anticipated with a morbid eagerness the season when he would really give him lessons in mechanical drawing and construction of machines. The manufacturer was a man of genius in his way, self-taught, loving work and glorying in it. He had a workshop at the top of his house fitted out with completely finished tools and mechanical appliances of many kinds. There he spent his happiest hours, experimenting with his inventions and models for improvements in machinery. He was impatient of dullness and often irritable. But on the other hand his wrath was short-lived, and he was anxious to heal by kindness the wounds which his hard words sometimes inflicted.

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